

Real Life choices

Now that you are participating in Real Life Choices, searching for services can seem like an overwhelming task especially when there is so much to do in our every day lives.

Where do I begin?

What is the most important matter that I need to happen now?

What do I want to address further down the road?

The following is just some helpful hints to guide you along your way as you navigate the new world of self direction.

How do I get started?

Prioritize: Make a list of short term goals (things I need to happen now). Make a list of long term goals (things I want to see happen some time in the future).

Examples:

Now: I need a companion to take “Matt” out on Saturdays from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m. I also need a home health aide to come into my home from 6 a.m. to 8 a.m. to help “Matt” get ready for program so I can get to work on time.

Later: “Matt” really enjoys swimming. I would like to find a gym with an indoor pool so he can swim a few days a week and perhaps learn to use some of the exercise equipment. “Matt” loves glue and glitter! I would like to find an arts & crafts class for him to participate in. He enjoys going on the internet to look up trains but doesn’t always know how to use the search engine. I would like to find a computer class that “Matt” could attend. I would like to research a new day program for “Matt” or even look into exploring volunteer/work opportunities for him a few days per week. I would like to talk with other families participating in Real Life Choices and see what choices they have made. I would like to explore more creative options as well rather than sticking to typical, traditional choices.

These are just examples. Everyone’s lives differ; what they want to do; what they enjoy doing for work and fun, interests, hobbies; their likes and dislikes. Tailor your search based on your loved ones gifts and abilities and what is necessary for them to remain safe and healthy.

What help is available to me as I navigate this new world of self-direction?

Supports Coordinator

You can also trouble shoot and problem solve with your Supports Coordinator. They are available to assist you through the process while allowing you to remain in control while navigating the new world of self-direction.

Family Mentor

Family mentors are individuals who have a Real Life Choices participant in their family. They are available to help your family with the process of self direction. Family Mentors can share their own real life experiences regarding self-direction and offer the added support you may need. Ask your Supports Coordinator to connect you to a Family Mentor in your area.

Peer Mentors

In the near future, peer mentors will be available to help individuals with Real Life Choices plan and direct their supports.

Family Networking Meeting

You can attend a Family Networking Meeting when available in your region to meet other families participating in Real Life Choices. Ask your Supports Coordinator for the time and place of the next meeting in your area.

How do I search for the services I need?

It's easy to search for the services you need. The Family Support Center of NJ has a list of approved providers you can choose from. Click on "Search for Services" at the top of this page. Click on "DDD Qualified Providers" and follow the prompts to obtain a list of approved providers in your area offering the services/supports you are looking for.

What happens after I obtain a list of approved providers in my area?

Once you locate a provider, pick up the phone and give them a call. Ask for the **Real Life Choices** contact person or person in charge of hiring support staff. Once you are speaking to the right person, let them know what services/supports you need.

Example:

I need a companion for my son who enjoys crafts and would accompany him to an arts and crafts class. They would have to be willing to help him with his crafts projects as well. This person has to have a valid driver's license and wouldn't mind mass quantities of glue and glitter on their hands. This individual would have to enjoy surfing the net with my son, looking up trains and train shows in our local area. They would also have to take him to and stay with him during his computer class. They need to be calm and supportive with him if he gets upset over sudden changes in his schedule. They would have to be able to support him with his meals at home, prepare the food for him, cut it up into bite sized pieces and monitor him when he eats to make sure he does not eat too quickly. This individual would have to be able to help him get changed if necessary and be sure he washes his hands once he is finished in the rest room.

How do I negotiate a rate?

While speaking with the **Real Life Choices** contact person, discuss an hourly rate. Currently the rate for companion services is **up to** \$20.00 per hour. If you like, you can negotiate an hourly rate. A good place to start is at \$17.00 per hour or whatever dollar amount you think is fair. You can pay less than \$20.00 per hour but you **cannot pay more** than \$20.00 per hour for companion services.

Some providers are willing to negotiate and others are not. Shop around to get the best services you can for your Real Life Choices dollars. Remember, you are the boss.

Should I share my Real Life Choices budget with the providers I interview?

No, it is not advisable to share your total Real Life Choices budget amount with providers. Like shopping for a car, don't let them know the total amount you have to spend.

What do I do after I have chosen a provider?

First, set up an appointment to meet with the Real Life Choices contact person and/or the potential support person. You may want to meet at a neutral location to discuss and interview them rather than in your home. Local mall food courts, Starbucks, or Dunkin' Donuts are nice places to meet and talk. Choose a location of your liking where you will feel most comfortable. Come prepared with a list of questions. You may want to ask about their experience, background, and if they have similar interests as your loved one. Be clear with what you are looking for in a staff person (i.e.: reliable, experienced, supportive, patient, caring etc.). Remember, you are the boss, directing your dollars the way you choose.

Should I share the Essential Lifestyle Plan with my provider?

Once you feel comfortable with your provider, it would be a good idea to share the Essential Lifestyle Plan (ELP) with them. The best portions of the ELP to share are: "What is Important to ____"; "What are the Characteristics of People Who Support ____ Best?"; "What Others Need to Know or Do to Support ____"; "What Other People Need to Know or Do to Help ____ Stay Healthy and Safe"; and "How ____ Communicates".

Should I leave my son/daughter alone with the new support person from the beginning?

In the beginning, you may want to ask your support person to stay with your loved one in your home, under your supervision, until they appear comfortable and compatible with one another.

If the support person is not a good match with your family member, you have the right to choose a different individual from that provider who would be more compatible **OR** even choose another provider. The beauty of Real Life Choices is **you** have the right to change, choose and direct how the supports look and the way they are carried out.

Remember, at any time during your self-direction journey, help is just a phone call away. If you are stuck, confused, or need some assistance with searching for supports, you can talk with your Supports Coordinator or the Family or Peer Mentor in your county. Ask your Supports Coordinator for their contact information. Also, please take advantage of the **On Line Forum for Families and the Family Networking Meetings** in your region.

Congratulations, you are on your way!